



Sand Live Oak
(*Quercus germinata*)

The most common oak seen along the trails, the sand live oak is recognizable by its leathery leaves which curl over at the edges. Other oak species in the preserve include myrtle oak, dwarf live oak, and Chapman's oak. If fires occurred here more frequently, oak trees would be less common.

The red-shouldered hawk is often seen along the roads hunting for snakes and frogs. It has rusty-colored wings, barred breast feathers, and noticeable white bands on its tail. Listen for its shrill "kee-yeer" call, but don't be fooled by mimicking blue jays.

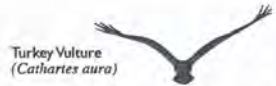


Red-shouldered Hawk
(*Buteo lineatus*)



Bald Eagle
(*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*)

Bald eagles, black vultures and turkey vultures can all be seen flying above the preserve, although black vultures are the most common. Eagles are usually seen alone or in pairs and soar with their wings flat. Vultures fly with their wings in a "V" shape, and are often seen circling in groups of 3 or more. Bald eagles do not get their white head and tail until they are over five years old.



Turkey Vulture
(*Cathartes aura*)



Black Vulture
(*Caragyps atratus*)

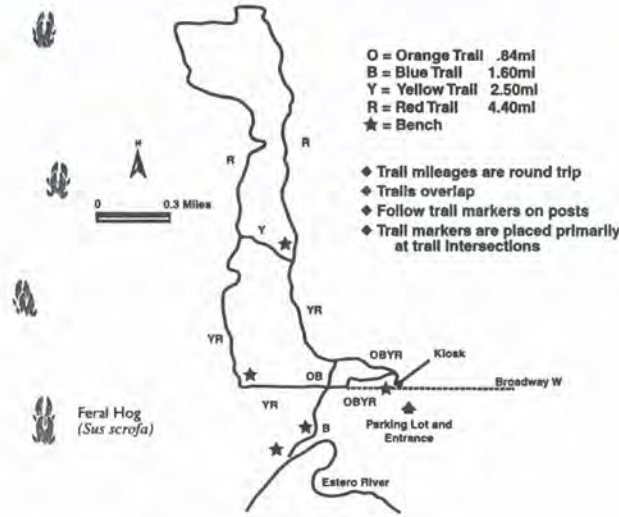


Downy Rose Myrtle
(*Rhodomyrtos tomentosa*)

Melaleuca and downy rose myrtle are invasive exotics. Invasive exotics are plants and animals that are not naturally found in the United States. They quickly reproduce and spread, forcing native plants and animals to compete with them for food and space. Downy rose myrtle is a shrub with pretty pink flowers, dark purple fruits and large glossy leaves. The melaleuca tree is recognized by its peeling, papery bark and white "bottle brush"-shaped flowers. Other invasive exotics in the preserve include Cuban anoles, feral pigs, Australian pine, and Brazilian pepper.



Melaleuca
(*Melaleuca quinquenervia*)



Feral Hog
(*Sus scrofa*)



Raccoon
(*Procyon lotor*)



Opossum
(*Didelphis virginiana*)



Provided in support from:



Contact Information

This site is managed by the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP), Office of Coastal and Aquatic Managed Areas (OCAMA). Are you interested in volunteer opportunities or making a financial contribution to our conservation efforts? Become a member of our citizen support organization, the Estero Bay Buddies, by calling the number below. Thank you for your support.

Estero Bay Aquatic and State Buffer Preserves
700-1 Fisherman's Wharf
Ft. Myers Beach, FL 33931
(239) 463-3240

Estero River Scrub



Welcome to the Estero Bay State Buffer Preserve. This preserve is about 9,000 acres, but the size continues to grow as we acquire more land. The Aquatic Preserve was established in 1966 and consists primarily of Estero Bay and its tributaries. This public access point is referred to as the Estero River Scrub (ERS), which includes approximately 1,245 acres along the Estero River.

Formerly destined to be a 1,500-unit housing development project, this parcel of land was purchased by the Florida Department of Environmental Protection in 2000. Its protection is critical to sustaining the native plant and animal communities that exist here.

As you walk the trails you will see scrubby flatwoods, pine flatwoods, salt marshes and salt flats bordering mangroves. For your protection and to show respect for this unique natural area, please remain on marked trails and remember that all plants and animals are protected within the preserve.

This trail guide provides a basic introduction to the plants and animals you are likely to see along the trails. Please contact us if you would like more information. Thank you and enjoy!

Gopher Tortoise Loop (Orange Trail) 8.4 mile



Gopher Tortoise
(*Gopherus polyphemus*)

A commonly seen resident of the scrub and scrubby flatwoods communities, the gopher tortoise is an expert burrower. Their burrows can be 3 to 35 feet long, and are used by at least 80 other species as shelter from the heat, predators and fires. It is illegal to feed, possess or in anyway harass this protected species. There is plenty of vegetation for gopher tortoises to munch on, so please don't share your people food!

This common Florida plant dominates the understory of the pine flatwoods community. In the summer, saw palmettos produce berries which are popular with raccoons, bears, and other animals.



Saw Palmetto
(*Serenoa repens*)



Slash Pine
(*Pinus elliotii*)

One of the most common trees in the area, slash pines are adapted to fire. Their thick bark is resistant to damage. Along the Red Trail, look for evidence of the wildfire that occurred here in 2001. You'll see slash pines with a charred appearance at the base. Scrub, scrubby flatwoods and pine flatwoods are fire-adapted communities, and are healthiest when burned every few years.



Green Anole
(*Anolis carolinensis*)

The small brown lizard you see darting among the saw palmetto or around your home is most likely the Cuban anole, also known as the brown anole. It is a very aggressive invasive exotic species. Unfortunately, it is replacing the native green anole which must compete with it for the same food.



Cuban Anole
(*Anolis s. sagrei*)

Estero River Trail (Blue Trail) 1.6 miles

Cabbage palms and sabal palms are the same species, and are very common throughout Florida. The term "cabbage" comes from the tree's edible heart. Palm berries ripen in the fall and are enjoyed by many wildlife species.



Cabbage Palm
(*Sabal palmetto*)



Tarflower
(*Befaria racemosa*)

Tarflower bushes are covered with sticky, pinkish-white flowers from March through May. This stickiness is a defense against ants and other insects who try to rob the flowers of their nectar without helping in pollination.



Osprey
(*Pandion halietus*)

Nicknamed the "fish hawk," the osprey is commonly seen on large, bulky nests high atop trees, telephone poles, or wherever a good fish meal can be found. They are white with a dark back, dark wings, and a distinctive dark eye stripe. Ospreys once experienced a rapid decline, but the banning of DDT and efforts to create nesting platforms have enabled this species to make a comeback.

Striped Mullet
(*Mugil cephalus*)



Blue-green with silvery sides, the Atlantic needlefish can often be found in the shallows of the Estero River. Its slim build and long slender jaw help it feed on smaller fish. Hear a loud splash but don't see anything? It's likely a striped mullet.

Atlantic Needlefish
(*Strongylura marina*)



Fiddler Crab Loop (Yellow Trail) 2.5 miles



Fiddler Crab
(*Uca rapax*)

The small fiddler crab lives in a burrow in the sand, which it plugs up when the tide comes in. When the tide recedes the crab emerges to feed, scraping algae and detritus off the grains of sand. "Feeding balls" made of sand are deposited outside the burrow opening as it eats.



Red Mangrove
(*Rhizophora mangle*)

The red mangrove, with its strange alien-like prop roots, occurs close to the shore and in deeper water. The black mangrove grows further inland and its roots look like dark, finger-like projections emerging from the soil. The white mangrove occurs well above the high tide mark and has large, rounded, football-shaped leaves.



White Mangrove
(*Laguncularia racemosa*)



Black Mangrove
(*Avicennia germinans*)

Found in salt marshes, salt flats are so salty that very few plants can grow there. One plant that can handle the high salinity is the sea ox-eye daisy. This low growing succulent has yellow flowers and fleshy, gray-green leaves covered with fine hairs.



Sea Ox-eye Daisy
(*Borrchia arborescens*)

Saltwort, sea purslane and glasswort are low growing plants that occur in salt marshes. Saltwort has smooth, succulent leaves and tiny flowers bunched on short spikes. Sea purslane has succulent leaves, a reddish stem and pink flowers. Glasswort has a translucent, beaded appearance with no obvious leaves or flowers.



Sea Purslane
(*Sesuvium portulacastrum*)

Saltwort
(*Batis maritima*)



Glasswort
(*Salicornia perennis*)

